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FOKINE

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FOKINE AS A MARQUIS.

FOKINE

By

LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

With an Introduction by
ARNOLD L. HASKELL.

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INTRODUCTION

Lincoln Kirstein is a *balletomane* after my own heart. He has followed ballet all over Europe, until finally ballet has followed him to America. We have worshipped at the same shrines, shared the same joys, been indignant at the same things.

It was difficult for Kirstein, too; as an American, he was one of the very few who still believed firmly in the vitality of ballet, and who refused to acknowledge either the novelty or worth of Wigmanism and the other abominations temporarily *à la mode* in his country. The triumph of de Basil's Ballets Russes and the inspired dancing of the new generation of dancers, has now proved him right. His path will be less difficult in the future.

Kirstein is not merely an enthusiast. He is a practical man, who is attempting a gigantic task, that of harnessing the immense dancing talent of America into a representative national ballet with the aid of Russian teachers and choreographers. He will probably succeed. In a very few years we may applaud his efforts.

One of our greatest interests in common has been the work of Michel Fokine, the subject of this monograph. Those of us, and there are more than a handful now, to whom ballet is a necessity, and those to whom it is a great pleasure, should say daily: "Thank God for Michel Fokine." For it is he who has taken a dying academic formula and made it into a living art.

ARNOLD L. HASKELL.

MICHEL FOKINE

I.

Michel Fokine was born in Saint Petersburg on the 26th of April, 1880. His father was a merchant of that city, very much occupied with artistic and intellectual interests. One of his sons, Vladimir, was to be an actor; Nicolas, a student of philosophy; Arthur was in the world of the Dramatic Theatre, and Alexander was an athlete.

Young Fokine entered the Imperial School of Ballet in 1889. His masters were Platon Karsavin, the father of the great ballerina Tamara Karsavina, with whom Fokine was later to create such brilliant dances, Volkov, Skiraev, Nicolas Legat and Guerdt. It was the wonderful faculty of the nineteenth century School, mostly pure Russian based on the French. Christian Johanson, an old man of eighty, who held the perfection class, was a Swede. One remembers that Peter the Great had young Swedish officers, held as prisoners from his wars, as his first, perhaps the first Russian, ballet. Fokine never worked with Cecchetti.

As a schoolboy, Fokine was mischievous and high-spirited. He was constantly being caught in various pranks which were infringements of the strict regulations, and served many terms of lonely incarceration, dressed in a grey prison suit, in the brig.

The curriculum of the Imperial School was of a surpassing rigour emphasising the classical exercises, adagio, and mime, as anyone who has read "Theatre Street" knows. A young student who could be selected for that great institution and survive for the nine or ten years of intense activity, emerging

as a fine dancer, was merely for that remarkable. But one who could emerge not only as a dancer, but as a trained body controlled by a questioning, incisive creative mind, might be capable of anything in his chosen field. Fokine finished his formal schooling on the 23rd of May, 1898. He had made his official debut on the stage of the Marinsky Theatre while still a student, which was exceptional, and he entered the permanent company of dancers on the first of June of the same year, where he appeared in such ballets by Petipa as *Swan Lake*, *Raimonda* and *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Already in 1894 Fokine had conceived of an idea for a ballet of his own. It was based on the Greek legend of Daphnis and Chloe. He wrote an introduction to his libretto, for presentation to the Directors of the Imperial School, in which he suggested that in his ballet there should be no artificial pauses in which the dancers broke the continuity of the action to receive the expected applause after a brilliant series of pirouettes. The Intendant of the Imperial Theatre, Teliakovsky, read the suggestions and filed them in the School's graveyard of good intentions—the library.

But Fokine, some time later passing by the Bulletin Board, not of the Ballet, but of the Imperial Opera, saw the official order posted that in the future no singers could take bows during the course of a performance. This, in its indirect attack, was the first influence of the many reforms which Fokine was to institute, and which inside of ten years was to affect vitally the whole development of a tradition of four centuries of theatrical dancing.

Even when he was a pupil in the early classes of the School, Fokine spent a great deal of his free time in the Hermitage and in private galleries of the capital. In his vacations he would ride in from his home in the suburbs on a bicycle and make drawings from marbles, and copy paintings in oils, investigating the whole history of the graphic and plastic arts. This he did for his own amusement and instruction, without any thought of becoming a professional painter or sculptor, giving the results of these studies to his family. Those hours in the long corridors of the great galleries were to be as influential in the development of his gifts as the tedious mornings of repetitious exercises, the difficult tricks of support, balance and stance in the school itself.

For the boys' dormitory he painted a large ikonostasis in oil on canvas, of the legend of St. Veronica's veil, where Christ's tearful face was imprinted on the Sudarium. In front of it a lamp burned perpetually. The Director's office was decorated by a still-life arrangement of fruit and flowers, also by Fokine's hand.

Then, in the April of 1905, Fokine was to design the dances of a ballet to be performed by members, not of the Marinsky Company, but of the Imperial School. The subject he chose was again Greek, this time the legend of Acis and Galatea. He made researches into archæology, intending the dances of the Greeks to have more connection with Attica than with the tutus of Petipa. He sought out the chief librarian of the Czar's books, Vasily Stasov, an old man with a white beard, who was enchanted by the idea of a dancer reading a book. No one ever asked Stasov anything. Now

this shy young choreographer made the most particular demands on his information. Fokine had been sent from the general reading room to a special department. He wanted to see all the results of the discoveries of Schliemann and the German resurrectors of Troy. He looked at the huge catalogues of the great French and Italian collections of classical marbles. He studied big flat books of engravings of the Parthenon and Olympia.

Fokine visualised a ballet without toe-dancing, in bare feet, in a background of fluted pillars and clear blue sky. Independent of the direct influence of Winckelman, Pater or Nietzsche, Fokine aimed at a resurrection of the Dionysian ideal. But when Pisnetchevsky, the Inspector of the Imperial School, read the ideas for the production, he said: "You must be mad. You've been teaching these children toe-dancing for years. Now in their first grown-up performance you want to take them off their toes. You'll spoil them completely."

Fokine saw the sense of the argument. He had to wait and bide his time. There were plenty of people around the School who considered him a dangerous revolutionary. What was the matter with the old dancing? It was good enough for our great dancers. There are none greater in the world. What is he trying to do? And the Press tried to make out that Fokine was aiming against all canons of good taste, and destroy the standards of Petipa.

On the twentieth of April, 1905, at the Mihailovsky Theatre, *Acis and Galatea* had its first performance. It was not really revolutionary, but it had about it the atmosphere of innovation. Fokine did not want to destroy tradition. On

the other hand, he greatly admired the magnificent ingenuity of the creator of *The Sleeping Beauty*. And Petipa, who had retired the year before, after fifty years as the French king of Russian ballet, watched the performance. Afterwards, behind the scenes, Fokine was handed a card: "*Cher camerade, enchanté de votre composition: continuez et vous serez très grand maître de ballet. Marius Petipa.*"

Events had conspired to make Fokine seem even more of a revolutionary. It was 1905, the terrible year of the general strikes, the hideous massacre of the people before the Winter Palace, led by the priest-provocateur Gapon. The employees of the state theatres were servants of the Czar, and the Ballet was supported by his private purse, in the most extravagant luxury. But this did not prevent a number of the artistes from presenting certain claims to the Czar, and in October, 1904, a petition had been signed, demanding the preservation of high standards of working conditions and artistic excellence. With considerable courage *Tamara Karsavina, Anna Pavlova and Michel Fokine had tried to stop a performance of Tchaikovsky's opera *La Dame de Pique* as a sympathetic strike. Pavlova describes how she and Fokine made speeches, passionately pleading for solidarity in the best trade union manner. The attempt failed. The signers awaited immediate dismissal on grounds of *lesé majesté*. The air was thick with rumours of secret terror, spies, agents-provateurs, even in the highest court circles. The republic proclaimed by the first Soviet of the Sixteenth of October fell. But the dancers were forgiven.

*See Theatre Street, the memoirs of Tamara Karsavina.

The Czar at least had an accurate idea of the value of their art.

Isadora Duncan came to St. Petersburg in 1905. Fokine may have read about her, but he had never seen her. There has been much confusion in the criticism of dancing as to the exact relationship between Fokine and the great American. Independently of each other they had come to certain conclusions about the liberation of gesture. Independent of each other they were both greatly influenced by nineteenth-century researches of Greece; Isadora, inspirationally, from the observation of the static poses on Greek painted vases and sculpture; Fokine from his studies in the museums and libraries. The main difference was that Isadora was a great personality capable of enormous personal conviction. After her death her school collapsed. Fokine, supported by the supple conventions of theatrical dancing, free from any necessity of mere self-expression, could incorporate the best of his findings and innovations in the continuous tradition which he was to see marvellously revived. As Arnold Haskell has written: "There has been Duncanism; there never can be Fokinism."

In the meanwhile, suspicious as the officials were of him, Fokine continued to create ballets, not for the Marinsky Theatre itself, but for the very popular charity performances, in which he could make use of Marinsky artistes. At the Mihailovsky Theatre he produced *The Vine*, a ballet with music by Rubenstein. At a cafe where peasants drink, the spirits of the grape combine in a classical *divertissement*,

but with the growing emphasis of a liberated movement, and in it Anna Pavlova danced her first Bacchanal.

From Sienkiewicz's popular romance "Quo Vadis," Fokine produced the two-act ballet *Evrika* or *Eunice*,* in 1906. In it he introduced for the first time a studied dance of Egyptians based on the profile carvings of the processional figures, beside dances of Greek and Roman triumphs. While he was creating these ballets and constantly stirring for the real freedom which he knew would one day come, Fokine was a very important member of the Marinsky company, and a very great dancer. Not only did he create the chief roles in his own ballets, but he was Pavlova's partner in the dances he designed for her, and, for example, in *Sylphides*, she preferred him even to Nijinsky.

For a long time it seemed as if Fokine were fated to create his own ballets outside of the Marinsky where they so surely already belonged. Now, for example, the comic magazine *Satyricon* was giving a ball, and Fokine was asked to arrange the dances. It was to be an evening party in the Sala Pavlova, a huge public ballroom. Kornfeldt, the editor, and his friend Patiomkin, a poet, were calling the party *Carnival*. What could Fokine suggest? He thought at once of the early piano suite of Schumann. No more perfect dance music for such an occasion could be imagined. Kornfeldt and Patiomkin translated characteristic bits of Schumann's life and letters from German into Russian for him, and he absorbed the atmosphere of the period. Perfect: Now, how about decorations and costumes? Fokine suggested Leon

* Music by Tscherbatchev.

Bakst, naturally. Wonderful, they agreed, but impossible. He was so terribly expensive. Fokine persuaded Bakst to do it for half his regular fee, gave him part of his own money, for which he was presented with a painting; Bakst fell in love with the idea, and immediately saw the dresses in Schumann's age, the Viennese Biedermeier of eighty years before. Fokine was given three days for rehearsals. He had to rehearse in a ballroom where Bakst's carpenters were hammering on the walls. But even when *Carnival* was a great success in the Diaghilev repertory, not a single step was changed; only then the piano music was re-orchestrated by Glazounov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Liadov and Tchernepnin.

Fokine played the airs himself on a mandolin for the rehearsal, and in the difficult part of Harlequin, Leontiev first appeared. Later, it became one of Nijinsky's great parts, and the Paganini Variation is a piece of choreography so difficult, so wholly brilliant, that only another Nijinsky can accomplish it. The tempo is extremely rapid. It flies through the whole vocabulary of pirouettes, *à la seconde*, *en arabesque*, *en attitude* and *sur le cou de pied*, finishing, after the lightning whirls, with Harlequin sitting nonchalantly on the floor, knees crossed, as if anyone could have done it.

Carnival is a masterpiece in miniature, a perfect combination of technical ingenuity and romantic sentiment. The literature of dance criticism is full of descriptions and interpretations of it. But it has to be seen, and seen perhaps as it never can be seen again, with Nijinsky, Fokine, Cecchetti, Karsavina and Fokina, to be really appreciated. Nevertheless, J. E. C. Flicht, in "Modern Dancing and Dancers," has a fine résumé of it.

“M. Fokine has been wiser than to impose upon these irresponsible creatures of the musician’s fancy the burden of a formal plot. They merely flit across the stage in a succession of amorous episodes which take place during a masked fête—Pierrot deceived and suffering. Pantalón duped, Eusebius romantic, Florestan impetuous, Chiarina sentimental and Estrella turbulent.

“M. Bakst, the decorator, has completed the ballet by making it an exquisitely delicate artistic whole. The tinsel glitter and vast expenditure of means upon which the conventional ballet is usually built up has been utterly discarded. In its place is a simplicity verging on bareness, an economy of material in which every tone and line has an individual value, and bespeaks the guidance of a single directing mind. The curtain rises upon an almost empty scene, the ante-chamber of a ball-room. The backcloth is a broad band of purplish blue uplifting a deep frieze of red tulips. The furniture of the scene consists solely of two droll tiny striped sofas, crouching against the black and gold dado, which instantly put us on the tiptoe of expectation and gave the keynote of airy mockery that characterises the piece. Suddenly the tall curtains of this fastidious ante-chamber are parted and Chiarina and Estrella, followed by their distraught lovers, scamper in and out again. Gradually the room fills with crinolined figures, flashing amorous glances through the slits of their silk masks, and comical gentlemen whose quaintly cut green and golden brown jackets seem to travesty their woeful passions. The gaiety of the music dances through the shifting lights and softly flowing lines. And through this happy and heartless crowd

moves the tragic figure of Pierrot, whose unrequited love his fellows make a mock of. His costume and attitude are a masterpiece of design. His sleeves, a world too long, droop far below his finger-tips, forming a scheme of painful angles which most poignantly express his grotesque and lamentable passion."

Carnival was conceived specifically for a ballroom, where already a hundred persons were dancing, or would stop dancing to watch the ballet which could take place in front of their very eyes. It was designed, in its roundness, to be seen from all sides, and naturally, when it reached the stage it lost much of the impromptu enchantment of its initial occasion. The characters out of the *Commedia del Arte* seemed all the more fantastically real when many of the guests at the ball were no less curiously clothed than themselves. It was occasional choreography as exquisitely appropriate as Herrick's occasional verse.

The time was drawing near for the definite break with tradition, the frank avowal in terms of dancing of the ideas which Fokine had been so long formulating. It is difficult for a person twenty or thirty years afterwards to realise the weight of inertia of a hundred years that encumbered the feet, the hands, the entire bodies, and the whole *mise-en-scène* of dancers in a production at the Imperial Theatre, which had to be taken into consideration to win the official applause of the management.

Fokine, in a series of principles, demonstrated in his own ballets on the outlawed stages of charity affairs, a new canon of choreographic possibility, more serious in implication, more profound in influence than any other pronouncement

since Noverre, the Shakespeare of the dance, had sent out his letters on dancing in 1760.

The new Noverre stated and had shown that was impossible any longer to form automatic combinations of ready-made steps. One must create a real expression to fit the given subject. No longer could one put a string of *pirouettes*, a series of *fouettés*, *glissades* to right and left, ending with a *tour en l'air* and an *entre chat si* and call it anything but an exercise or a brilliant fragment without any point.

Nor does dancing or any kind of mimetic gesture have any meaning, except as they describe dramatic action. Gestures could no longer be used as a mechanical handshake or a mechanical bow, the dead formalization of empty court usages.

This conventional gesture can be used only when the style of the ballet demands it. No longer can gestures of the hands alone do service for the immobility of the rest of the figure. The whole body from head to toes is a dancer's instrument.

Groups and dancers in ensemble must be used expressively as a whole and not merely as a symmetrical decorative screen for three soloists. When a *pas de trois*, for example, was about to begin, the rest of the corps de ballet formerly bristled bluntly off the stage, leaving it free for the frank emphasis on three technicians. Fokine insisted on a participant troupe.

And finally, there must be an unbroken alliance between dancing and the allied arts of music and painting. Special ballet music is not required, which measure for measure follows the beats of the feet. Music of any fluency and

suitability can be used. No longer can a strip of plaid across a tutu, or a thistle behind one ear represent a Scotch peasant girl.

The occasion for the public presentation of these theories was *Une Nuit d'Egypte*. The composer Arensky had written a symphonic poem describing Cleopatra and her entourage, after a poem by Poushkin, inspired by Gauthier. It was originally prepared as a ballet by Petipa, for presentation at a court performance at Peterhof or Tsarskōeselo, where the dancing was to have taken place on a small island, illuminated by torches with the Queen floating in on a barge. Years ago Petipa had created the *Daughter of Pharaoh*,* influenced by a newly acquired collection of Egyptian antiques in the Berlin Museum. For one reason or another Arensky's was never done, and Fokine inherited the idea.

It was to be given at one of the charity performances and naturally there was little or no money to spend on it. Fokine went to the music library and extracted various serviceable bits for additional parts which he needed. As a background they had the dubious advantage of the first act dècor from *Aïda*. The wardrobes were rifled for Egyptian costumes, stray swords and spears, helmets and shields not in use. They still had tutus for the priestesses. Pavlova was Cleopatra, the role later mimed by the beautiful amateur, Ida Rubinstein. Fokine was the rash young priest, and Guerdt, his old teacher, appeared in a triumphal march as Antony, in a scene which was later omitted when Bakst reset the ballet for the Diaghilev repertory. But in the first

*Music by Pagni.

performance there were chariots and horses, and most marvellous of all, the chorus wore no corsets or short skirts, but bore some resemblance to the Egyptians in the sculpture. The wigs were actually close-curved coiffures startlingly like the very ones the smart ladies of the audience were wearing. The dancers' eyes were underlined and heightened by mascara and kohl into the ancient convention. Just as when Gardel, in the 18th century, had suddenly to appear without the usual dancer's full-bottomed wig, so now, in one evening, Fokine destroyed a hundred years of strict meaningless cliché in theatrical disguise.

The dances themselves were of an equally sensational nature. The famous bacchanal was not added until later, but the frank abandon of the dances, the continuous interplay of released action, personalised, making the past more real than the present, created a sensation directly comparable to the Romantic revolution of the first night of *Ernani*. Fokine's dancers did not move in the single profile of Egyptian reliefs. Their gestures, reminiscent of the stone, were heavy with a concentrated activity. The proscenium framed, not a geometrical symbol of Egypt, but the sense of the air of Pharaoh's house itself.

Later, when Bakst designed the great temple, and there was new music, but few new steps, it was an essentialized Karnak or Luxor, and with Rubinstein or Astafieva in the hierarchy of Fokine's completely realized gesture, Paris was overwhelmed by the proud assault of sensuality on every sense, through sight, sound and sympathetic participation with the dancing figures. But even at the first restricted charity benefit, the world had realized there was a new genius

to contend with. It was the first battle of the revolution and Fokine was the victor, however suspected, but unrewarded at the time.

The opposition, ever eager, niggardly, envious and inert, the perennial thorn in the flesh of any creator, agreed that it was all very well for the young choreographer to go on making up bare-foot ballets; but after all there was such a thing as tradition. Anybody could take off his shoes and run around a stage. Dancing on points; adagio, allegro—the School was something else again.

Fokine was frankly and naturally ambitious. He wished to prove he could create in any style, whether it was his own innovation or the ancient idiom. He would do a classical ballet, but it would be his idea of the classic. It would be lyric rather than acrobatic. And so he selected some piano music of Chopin, which was to be orchestrated by Glazounov.

Chopiniana displayed the composer on a deserted isle, ill and alone. Visions rose from the melodies of his piano, a dead monk, sinister and commanding, swans, evanescent spirits. Chopin was by turns nervous and tragic, joyful and deathly. A mazurka accompanied a rural Italian wedding; a polonaise, a group of girls. There was the C Sharp Minor *Valse* for Pavlova and Obuchov. Always the innovator, even when he resuscitated a moribund medium, Fokine clothed his dancers, not in the ordinary short tarletans of the Imperial Company, but in the long, stage-sweeping tutus, à la Taglioni. This was even more unusual than his conception. It is hard to overestimate the profound, if accidental, effect the history of costume has had on the history of dancing.

There are two *Chopinianas*. The first was composed in 1906. The second, which has come to be known as *Sylphides*, sprang from the first, but was divested of any literary ideas whatsoever. Composed, in three quick rehearsals, with some groups actually created on the stage a few minutes before the curtain rose, it came to be the best-loved ballet in the Diaghilev repertory, a monument of pure classical dancing, and the only one of which the great impresario himself said he would never miss a performance.

The *Sylphides* that we know was first designed and danced for Fokine's own class of girls in the Imperial School, for their graduation. The dancer Bekeffi created the male role, and the Director of the School, because Fokine was not as yet an official maître de ballet, bought the rights of it for the Marinsky repertory.

Diaghilev renamed it *Sylphides* after Taglioni's famous success *La Sylphide* which drove so many mid-nineteenth century *balletomanes* to the peak of ecstasy. The music was brilliantly reorchestrated by Stravinsky (his first commission for Diaghilev were the opening and closing numbers of *Sylphides*, the *Nocturne* in A flat and the *Valse Brillante* in E flat), Tcherephin, Glazounov and Liadov. The presence of Preobrajenska, Pavlova, Karsavina and Nijinsky, as the great four in this ballet, are on an equal plane to the *pas de quatre* of Grisi, Grahn, Taglioni and Elssler. Like any pre-eminent masterpiece, there is that about *Sylphides* which eludes any description except in its own medium of movement; its accurate reproduction. Useless to talk of swans swimming in a geometry of air, or to attempt to ver-

balize the ineffable graciousness or languor of the pattern. Twenty-two white dancers and a young man, his long blonde hair falling on to the open white silk shirt covering a black velvet tunic, are the impersonal players in this plotless tragedy, tragic without climax, but a perfect symbol of the possibility of perfection in the world, a perfection only remotely possible in the ritual of such choreography as this.

The score is Chopin's, but after the Ballet one can never hear the crystal waltzes or the swung mazurka without transparent visions of beautiful action which Fokine married to the music. It was created in three days to be sure, but how much essentialized, simplified and eloquent formality went into the consolidation of the language that Fokine mastered, even to its most rhetorical and exact idiom. In it, the spirits of Taglioni, of Pavlova, of Karsavina, of Nijinsky and of Fokine have an indestructible temple. *Sylphides* stands, in our century, a monument to the deathless vigour of dancing which can touch hands with any century of whatever time.

All this time, Fokine, although he danced upon the stage of the Marinsky Theatre, was regarded with far too much suspicion to be allowed to compose with any degree of freedom. There was no telling what he might do. But the inevitable progression of his influence was naturally felt.

At a concert Fokine heard a suite of dances from an unrealized Ballet by the conductor-composer Tcherepnin, entitled *Pavillon d'Armide*, inspired by Gauthier's *Omphale*. He was so impressed with the suitability of the music that, after the performance, he went back-stage and introduced himself to its author. He asked his permission to use this

music for a school-recital, in which the students, not the actual Marinsky members, would dance. Tcherepnin was delighted. He'd always visualized a ballet for his music. More than readily he gave his consent. As a composer, he seemed to have had little luck with the officials. He industriously wrote his charming music which was practically always immediately filed in the safety of the Music Library.

At first *Pavillon d'Armide* was modest in scale. But Teliakovsky, the Intendant of the Imperial Theatre, saw the school performance and asked Fokine to do a full-sized version of it. Through Tcherepnin, Fokine had met Alexandre Benois, a great Russian stage-designer of French descent, whose particular field of creative research was the century of the *Roi Soleil*, Versailles and the fantasies of Marly.

Benois conceived a libretto for the action, a grand ballet in three acts. Fokine insisted that it should be one, and much more tightly concentrated. Benois was in his beloved France; Fokine on a vacation in Switzerland. In August of 1907, Fokine returned and went for the first time to Benois' studio. The position of this artist in the theatrical life of the Tsarist capital was extremely important. Not only was he a great student and archæologist, a fine artist and critic in his own right, but also he was one of the focus points in the brilliant group of *Mir Iskousstvo* or "The World of Art," a magazine and a society which revolved around the persons of Leon Bakst and Sergei Pavlovitch Diaghilev. Over many glasses of tea, by dint of long nocturnal conferences, the collaboration in *Pavillon d'Armide* was achieved, and Fokine had found a strong band of energetic talents,

convinced of the necessity of a cleansing revolt to purify their great tradition, with whom he could co-operate.

The eighteenth century, not only the time of Lebrun, Watteau, Mansard, and Lenôtre, not only of Molière and Gluck, but also of the Italian and Russian designers of Peterhof, the Winter Palace, the Hermitage, the architects Restrelli, Lucchini and Bashenov, and the Russian provincial portraitists under the influence of Nattier and Rigaud, meant a very great deal to the cosmopolitan Russians of the nineteen-hundreds. The grandeur of France, swollen into the superb plaster pomposity of a metropolitan, yet still provincial St. Petersburg, had a curious fascinating nostalgia for these artists. It was the last magnificent surfeit of grandeur, half-consciously held on to, before the unthinkable possibility of the inevitable change—hinted at in 1905, made fact in 1917. And still the colossalism, the great proportions, the delicate echoes of classical remains transformed by eighteenth-century archeologues exerts its powerful sentiment in its ghosts of the Imperial manner.

Pavillon d'Armide, as finally set by Benois and Fokine for Diaghilev had an evocation of this eighteenth century, redolent with the touching proximity of the pathos of distance, which every decade attaches to some chosen period of the past.

The ballet opened in the time of the Empire. A young hunter, lost, seeks refuge for the night in a pavilion hung with Gobelins, and in his dreams, the warp and woof of the woven paintings become living transparencies, and the past scene gives way to a fête in the monumental bosage of the Basin de Neptune under Louis Quatorze. *Pavillon d'Armide* was freely conceived in the classical style, but

with tones from the tales of Hoffmann's fantasy. There was dancing on points, but here the setting of the period gave the formula a new point and a new pretext for correlated spectacle and movement. Fokine would have to wait before he was really liberated into his ideal music drama. *Armide* was the penultimate step. What impressed most intelligent balletomanes at the time of its presentation in Western Europe was not a new coloration of the old *ballet d'action*, but such instances of a grotesque wit, and underlying inhuman irony, as in the dance of seven buffoons. It was the creation by Fokine of a deep emotional overtone on a comparatively conventional base.

The part of *Armide* himself was studied for the body of Nijinsky. In the second act there was an incredible sidewise leap, covering half the big stage, and dancers after him did well to sweat with nervousness, in anticipation of this gruelling, but elegant rôle.

It is difficult, after twenty or thirty years, not to read each new creation of Fokine, as a consciously consecutive chapter in the maturing of his genius. He, of course, would be the first to deny this, just as he denied with considerable amusement any Marxian *arrière-pensée* when he had read recently a communist interpretation of his ballets in the light of dialectic-materialism and the Russian class-struggle. Fokine is a human being. His most famous creations were almost always, at least in their initial impulse, accidental and considerably more tentative and haphazard than one might imagine. For example, take the renowned *Dying Swan*, composed in 1908, which after the miraculous pattern of Pavlova's *pas de bourré*, entered the dancing classes of the

world. It is entirely untrue that the ballerina kept a private pond for pet swans so that she could study their movements for hours at a stretch.

As usual there was a charity performance to be held. Pavlova had promised her services and asked Fokine to design something for her. He suggested taking the *Swan* from Saint-Saëns' *Vie des Animaux*. Fokine composed his lyric in perhaps less than an hour, upon the body, and for the superb legs of Pavlova. But he thought as much of her calves as of a swan's sinuous neck.

Diaghilev, in the years 1902 to 1908, had shown Paris, and the western world that there was more to Russian music than Rubenstein or even Tchaikovsky. There was Rimsky-Korsakov, for example, and Moussorgsky. At a great show of Russian painting he had displayed for the first time in the West not only Roerich and Bakst, but ikons and Scythian bronze. The great choirs of the combined Imperial Opera Houses of Moscow and St. Petersburg had astonished the staid *Opéra* with *Ivan le Terrible* and *Boris Godunov*.

Now it was the turn of the Ballet. Diaghilev chose not only dancers from the Marinsky Theatre, but also Muscovites and Poles. He gained Imperial patronage. His troupe was unequalled up to that time in history and must remain so for our century. For not only had it the advantage of Fokine, Karsavina, Pavlova, Nijinsky, Bakst, Benois and Roerich, but had the added gratuitous, but wholly incalculable, advantage of breathless novelty. Literally no one in Europe had even seen anything like it before. It was Russian, violent, semi-Slav, half barbaric, unheard-of, shocking, exquisitely exciting. It was not *le bon gout* : it was not even

mauvais gout. It was *quelque chose de nouveau* with a delicious vengeance.

Fokine naturally was asked to be a choreographer-general to the Diaghilev expeditionary company. This he could do because his only official attachment to the Marinsky Theatre was as soloist to the Czar. It would take repercussions of the Diaghilev season at the Chatelet to put him in the position he had so long deserved, as maître-de-ballet of the Imperial Theatres.

It might be only fair here to say a few words in regard to the influence of Diaghilev. No one could wish to deny the power, the genius of this great man. Our time is for ever in his debt. But it is best to know for exactly what we are in his debt. He brought Stravinsky and Prokoviev to our ears, Bakst and Picasso to our eyes, Nijinsky and Karsavina to our hearts and minds, but he did not create the modern Russian Ballet. He transported the greatest aggregation of dancers the world has ever known to all Europe, and North and South America, but he did not create the Russian Ballet. Before he ever met Sergei Pavlovitch, Fokine had composed *Carnival*, *Cléopâtre*, *Sylphides* and *Pavillon d'Armide*, besides his experimental ballets and divertissements. Fokine had created a new style of dancing and had not destroyed, but indeed revived the dynasty. The step from Petipa to Fokine in the dance is greater than from Rossini to Wagner in music. Michel Fokine created the Russian Ballet.

Now Fokine went to Paris and rehearsed *Armide* on the stage of the rehabilitated Chatelet, between a flock of sheep used in the transformation scene, and piles of costumes. His four best ballets reset especially for the occasion, were in

the repertory, and in addition the Polovotzian Dances from Borodin's Opera, *Le Prince Igor*, a choral work based on the Slavic national epic, "The Tale of the Armament of Igor." The dances for *Prince Igor* were the capital on the column Fokine erected to the liberation and intensification of theatrical dancing. Its brilliance, its passion, is young after a quarter of a century. Only the uncapturable, deep first breathless shock at its unforeseen wildness is faded.

Fokine wished to suggest, without the least infringement of museum reconstruction, the ferocity of a Tartar encampment, a nomad invasion at rest for a night, celebrating, in anticipation, the morrow's battle. How well he succeeded can best be explained in the incident of old General Bezobrazov, a soldier-balletomane, timidly approaching him on Benois' arm during a rehearsal, with the apologetic suggestion that "Well, really, I don't know exactly what I would suggest your doing with it, but, well, couldn't you make it a little less, er, you know what I mean" Fokine replied he didn't know or care what the General meant, but he knew exactly what he, Fokine, wished to convey: the ballet if anything would be heightened in its tension. The Intendant, Teliakovsky, in his memoirs, admits that nothing like *Igor* had ever been seen before. It was almost too much.

Before *Igor*, the *corps de ballet* was always subordinate to the soloists, almost grudgingly admitted to participation in the action. *Igor* has hardly any solo dancing. It makes a hero of the chorus. The crushing and tender counterpoint of the male and female choirs have their exact counterpart in the men's and the women's dances. The active, the sudden, the fierce, the perpendicular, is penetrated and linked

with the floating, the swaying, the sweeping, the passive, the horizontal.

“How excellently every means that the theatre offers has been made use of to produce the desired effect!” writes a discriminating critic in an admirable analysis of the qualities that make so resistless an appeal to our imagination; “menace of the coming cloud of barbarians that is to lie for centuries on the desolate face of Russia—not the loud blustering of a Tamburlaine the Great, but the awful quiet vigour, half melancholy, half playful, of a tribe that is itself but a little unit in the swarm; the infinite horizons of the steppe, with the line of the burial tumuli stretching away to endless times and places, down the centuries, into Siberia; the long-drawn, resigned, ego-less music (Borodin drew his themes from real Tartar-Mongol sources): the women that crouch unconscious of themselves, or rise and stretch lazy limbs, and in the end fling themselves carelessly prone when their dance is over; the savage-joyful panther-leaping of the men; the stamping feet and quick nerve-racking beat of the drum; and, more threatening than all, the gambolling of the boys, like kittens unwittingly preparing themselves for the future chase.”

On the stage the Tartars hopped and leaped and twirled like tops. They were fierce and passionate and their Mongolian savagery was inherent in the curves of their painted moustaches, their eyelids and their legs kick-out and replace, their hands thrust forward and swept back in perfect precision and gracious order. The figures revolved round and round, the women in their veils swaying and passing the stamping men, then stooping to let the archers form a ring

around them. Sometimes there was a pause in the music and the dancers paused, but the audience never rested for a second, for the gaps in the action were as rich in texture, in feeling, as the highest leaps or most sinuous glides—and always the beat, the breathless easy precision, the rightness as if every possibility of visual and active development had been exhausted. The mould filled perfectly with the most molten and yet immutable bronze.

The archers leaped high and pulled their bows and all the thousand invisible arrows flew into the sunset of the Tartar plain. The women ranged on the edges of the encampment, shifted their trousered legs and swayed softly in counterpoint to the strenuous vaultings of the cone-capped hunters, and suddenly the ballet gathered itself into a maelstrom, and all of them—hunters, archers, concubines and warriors swirled about the stage, opposing the rhythm of each group as strenuously as in a physical combat, and the curtain fell on a mounting fort of men, their bows taut to the sky, mounting up in a shifting din of gongs and clangour and iron fire.

When Fokine had been at the Imperial School he was not taught any “character” dancing. But he realized the importance of dances evolved from the soil, as an expression of the natural impulses of a folk. The dances which had steps evolved from crushing grapes, from wielding a flail or an axe, or evoking a simple religious or superstitious emotion, had been formulated by centuries of reiterant use, and expressed, in a way the convention of classical ballet never could, the essence of a racial characteristic, a geographical locale.



IN DAPHNIS AND CHLOE.

For the first Diaghilev season in Paris 1909, Fokine combined a number of such national dances under the title of *Festin*. The scene was the huge rough-timbered hall which Kolovin had painted for the first act of *Ruslan and Ludmilla*. Tables set on a dais were set for a great feast and enormous candelabra swung from the rafters. *Festin* was calculated to demonstrate the whole corps-de-ballet just as had *Igor*. But with the difference that *Igor* was a consecutive-danced scene entirely invented for the music, while *Festin* adapted different music to exhibit dances already known, but here amplified for the purposes of spectacle.

It opened with the famous March from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Coq d'or*, then a Glinka Lesghinka, and part of Tchaikovsky's *Golden Fish*. There was a Glazounov Czardas, a Moussorgsky Hopak, a Tchaikovsky Trepak, a *Pas Classique Hongrois* by Glazounov and a stirring finale from Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony. Some of these dances had in other forms been included in the Petipa ballets as *pas de caractère*. But Fokine welded them into a consistent whole, invented new ones, established a handsome *mise-en-scène*, and the pounding, driving, tense action of the quick dancers brought Paris to its feet, shouting. The supreme example of Fokine's use of folk dances is best realized not now, but two years later in *Petroushka*.

That fine critic and musicologist, M. D. Calvocoressi, has some interesting memoirs of Fokine back stage.

"Then there was Fokine, the ballet master. It was especially he who aroused my enthusiasm. To watch him at rehearsal was as great a treat as it was to watch Sanin.

Amazingly lithe and springy, cheerful and patient even when he might have had the best reason for losing his temper, he danced and rushed all round the stage, watching and stimulating every one of his dancers. He seemed to have a hundred eyes in his head. At an incredible speed, he would go round each line or group in turn, showing one dancer how to perform a step, correcting another one's attitude, helping a third to understand the rhythm and phrasing of the music. He had an unerring sense of construction as well as of colour and motion. I doubt whether, without him, Diaghilev's Ballet could have come into being."

When one takes into consideration all the work necessary to have created as much as Fokine had done, besides dancing and teaching, it seems almost incredible. Men seemed to breathe with a different strength in those days. And not only was there the ordinary routine of the company, but there was the practical re-creation of his own ballets for the inclusion, not in the Marinsky, but in the Diaghilev repertory, which was quite another thing. *Cleopatra*, for example, had been more or less slung together, but for Paris of 1910, Bakst created his red pillars, Fokine introduced his great bacchanal, and the music of Arensky was almost completely eliminated. "It was, musically speaking, a *weird and wonderful concoction in which entered, among other things, the Turkish Dances from Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, the Persian Dances from Moussorgsky's *Khovantschina*, the Bacchanal from Glazounov's *Les Saisons*, excerpts from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mlada*."

* M. D. Calvocoressi: "Musicians' Gallery": London, 1933.

Cléopâtre, based originally on Theophile Gautier's *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, in which the Queen seeks a night's lover who will dare to die at dawn, blasted Paris with the unabashed, abandoned, orientalism of the hot colour of Bakst and the sudden sensuality of Fokine. Just as the choreographer had reorganized his medium by the force of his genius, so had Bakst with his great splashes of raw colour, his sense of archeology heightened into life, re-created stage design. The combination of Bakst and Fokine was one of the most appropriate collaborations in the history of art, and one can get a clearer idea of the essence of Fokine's spirit, if one has never seen his dances, by looking at Bakst's costume plates, than at photographs of the ballet, as danced.

Cléopâtre was a *succes fou*, which introduced the mime Ida Rubinstein, a private pupil of Fokine's, whom he'd recommended for the part, to Diaghilev. She was *tall, slim, supple, and indolent, her face very white under a powder-blue wig. A wonderful moment was when the dancers, circling, unrolled the long strands of silken fabrics in which she was swathed like a mummy—whether this corresponded to any historical reality I am unable to say, but it was most effective. Then came a Bacchanal, at the end of which she and Fokine collapsed on to a couch around which the slaves held up a curtain. At that climax one could always feel a thrill running through the auditorium. A Frenchwoman said to me one day: 'Last night, I had a seat right at the side in the dress-circle. I was glad of that, because from there I could see Rubinstein and Fokine behind

* M. D. Calvocoressi.

the curtain. I had always longed to. I expected to see them continuing their love-making. Pas du tout : ils buvaient de la bière ! ' ' "

Once, during a performance of *Clèopatre*, when the applause was particularly violent after the great Bacchanal, either by mistake, or in an error of taste, the conductor of the orchestra gave the signal for an encore. Fokine was so angry at this flagrant breach of artistic good manners that he almost left Diaghilev, and only with difficulty could be persuaded to stay. Such questions of professional behaviour in dancing are necessities in any organization where individual artists are subordinated to the whole ensemble, and where the enthusiasm of an audience needs as much discipline as the bodies of the *corps de ballet*.

" Between great red gods* which framed a high hall was a court of a temple. At the back, through other columns, was a glimpse of the glistening Nile.

" Vaslav, a young soldier, and Karsavina, a slave-girl, a veil carried between them, enter the temple in a dance which is a *pas de deux*, not of conventional supported adagio, but love. The Queen was carried in on a palanquin which could have been a painted mummy-case. Set on the floor, her wrappings were whirled off her by slaves. A black panther of a man crouched under her divan, aching to kill the young warrior who came out of the temple shadows to her with helpless attraction. Cleopatra's part was mimed, not danced, in a semi-stylised manner—not rigid, but reminiscent of the hieroglyphics.

* Nijinsky, by Romola Nijinsky : London, 1933.

“ Ida Rubinstein’s beauty and magnificent body fitted this part perfectly. The little slave-girl, which was danced by Karsavina, alternating with Fokine, carried the action to the point where Nijinsky made his entrance with infinite verve and élan. There was a dark rout of negroes, a swaying dance of heavy Jewesses with swinging ornaments, and finally a wild bacchanal of Greek captives in an ecstasy of Dionysian frenzy, led by Karsavina and Pavlova—here only a dance in a ballet, but whose substance Pavlova lived on for years later in her Bacchanal.”

1910 was also the year of Stravinsky’s *Oiseau de Feu*. At a concert of the Conservatory of Music, Diaghilev had heard a short symphonic poem called *Feu d’Artifice* which impressed him, and he was surprised to learn it was composed by Igor, the son of the celebrated opera singer Feodor Stravinsky. It was not long afterwards, to everyone’s amazement, that the young musician had a commission to write a ballet expressly for the Diaghilev company.

For a long time Fokine had had the idea of a distinctly Russian story for dancing, founded on native legends. Fokine told the story of “Jar Ptiza” to Benois, over innumerable glasses of tea, and, with every glass, he added another embellishment, and every time he repeated the tale he put in another incident. Benois was enthusiastic and they went so far as to tell Diaghilev, and asked who would be a good one to compose the music. Liadov’s name was mentioned. “What,” cried Fokine, “and wait ten years!” Nevertheless, the commission was awarded to Liadov and three months passed.

Then Benois met him on the street and asked him how the ballet was progressing. "Marvellously," said Liadov. We've already bought my ruled paper." Benois' face fell and the musician, like a character out of Dostoevsky, added, "You know I want to do it, but I'm so lazy, I can't promise."

Diaghilev was told of the probable fate of the ballet if it was allowed to go on this way. He thought at once of Igor Stravinsky, and the conferences between him, Benois and Fokine commenced.

The young Czarevitch chances, while hunting, into an enchanted garden, following a gloriously beautiful Fire Bird, which he allows to escape, and which, in its gratitude, gives him one of the feathers of its flaming plumage as a token to prevent misfortune and ensure happiness. She warns the prince that he is in the terrain of Kotschei, a cruel magician. Soon, he is surrounded by beautiful maidens who dance around him, gathering golden apples, in an attempt to enchant him. He falls in love with a lovely princess who, like the other girls, is held prisoner by Kotschei. They beg him to escape, or else he will be petrified. He refuses, and when the magician appears and tries to charm him, he calls on the Fire Bird to his help, who comes in a flash of thunder and forces Kotschei and his retinue to dance until they fall dead of exhaustion.

"Fokine heard *Stravinsky's 'Fireworks' and saw flames in the music. The musicians made all manner of fun of what they considered his 'unnecessary' orchestration, and

* Nijinsky, by Romola Nijinsky: London, 1933.

he was touched by and grateful for Fokine's congratulations. They worked very closely together, phrase by phrase. Stravinsky brought him a beautiful cantilena on the entrance of the Czarevitch into the garden of the girls with the golden apples. But Fokine disapproved. 'No, no,' he said. 'You bring him in like a tenor. Break the phrase where he merely shows his head, on his first intrusion. Then make the curious swish of the garden's magic horse's return, and then, when he shows his hand again, bring in the full swing of the melody'."

Fokine made the choreography extremely fantastic. The steps are as rich in variation, as light and weird as the story itself, especially in the solo dances of the Fire Bird, which constantly imitate the movements of a feathered creature. The circular dance of the maidens around the Czarevitch, and later under the golden apple tree, is the most weaving, continuous enchantment of motion.

Golovin's scenery, of a garden with the castle of Katschei in the background, surrounded by trees as wonderful as in a dream, stylized, but so convincingly unreal that one felt the people here breathed a different air. The costumes were based on traditional Russian dress, fur-edged coats stiff with gold and jewels, and high embroidered leather boots. The Czarevitch sparkled with an encrustation of jewels. The Fire Bird's ballerina skirt was stiff with varying shades of flaming tarletans from palest lemon to deep orange and fiery red, and on her head was a tossing crown of feather flames. The maidens all wore a light, white material, heavily picked out with gold, and all the costumes were radiant, luminous, as if a child had imagined them.

“Fire Bird” was the first ballet, designed and composed as such from the first impulse, in which Fokine worked with a free hand. In “Schéhérezade,” produced in the same year for the Paris season of 1910, Fokine was creating, not as a brilliant experimentalist on the road towards his particular style, but as an accomplished technician, a matured choreographer and a great artist.

There was always some question as to who really had the very first embryonic idea of the ballet. Diaghilev asked Fokine to go to a concert and listen to Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Thousand-and-one Nights.” He thought it might not be bad for a ballet. Afterwards they went back to Sergei Pavlovitch’s flat on the Horse Guards Parade, and while he played over the piano score, the story was invented. Diaghilev spoke to Bakst, or perhaps it was Benois, as to who might do the costumes and scenery. Later when the dispute about the originator of the ballet had reached some proportions, and the painter Serov was asked to decide between Bakst and Benois, he decided in favour of Fokine.

“This was Bakst’s unquestionable masterpiece. Nowhere did he so completely express his creative ideas as in this ballet. He surpassed anything even he had yet done, in the incredible luxury of his colour. The scenery had no flats or practicable projections. It is all painted on the vivid walls and ceiling of the Harem in motives of green and violent blue, rising from a shrill pink carpet. A voluptuous sensation was suggested by the mixing of these sensuous colours. The effect on the public was the arousing of an immediate excitement. The front of the stage is draped

in a gigantic curtain, its folds of varying greens, on which designs of darker blue and circular patterns of pink were sprayed. Colours had never been so riotously used. In the blue background were three big doors of silver, bronze, blue and gold. Huge Arabian lamps swayed from the ceiling squares, and heaps of enormous cushions sprawled all over the stage.

“The story by Bakst and Fokine was taken from the tale of the Thousand-and-one Nights. It is at the court of Shah Zeman who, to entertain a brother luckless in love, takes him hunting. The disappointed brother tells him all women are faithless and his wives will prove the same. They leave for the chase.

“As soon as they are gone, the wives do their best to induce the chief Eunuch to let the slaves in for their lovers. The old guardian refuses until ordered by the Shah’s favourite, Zobeide, to obey. One after another, the doors are flung wide, and the slaves leap out at their lovers, and in a wild dance they celebrate their liberty, which mounts up to an orgy. Zobeide, longing for her own, finally bids the Eunuch to open the last door and a gorgeous golden slave bounds forth. An ecstasy of love convulses the harem, and at the point of orgasm, the two Shahs return. They are all transfixed. Fokine, with his infinite strength, brought through this movement the anguish, the fear of death, which suddenly petrifies the harem as they try to escape. But vengeance is swift. The Shah massacres the whole lot of them, and Zobeide, refusing to die by a slave, kills herself.

“ The music of Rimsky-Korsakov’s greatest symphonic poem admirably suited the action of the story. Rimsky had been a naval officer and much of it describes the sea, but here the second movement is omitted as the tempo is too slow to be danced, and it would make the ballet too long.

“ Rubinstein, who is tall, and whose movements are of a great plastic beauty, was admirable as Schéhérazade. Her gestures were a combination of dignity and sensuality and expressed the essential languors of a woman who demanded love.

“ The slave, danced by Vaslav, intensified the animal nature of human physical desire. When all the rest of the harem and the slaves sink exhausted after their love-making, Zobeide leans on the golden door, queenly, high as an obelisk, waiting the expectant joy in silence.

“ A pause, and suddenly a superb dark golden animal jumps from somewhere underneath, up to an incredible height, and covers her with the kiss of his whole body. With one shudder he possesses her; his jump is a tiger’s, once caged, now free for his victim. He rapes her in a single action and bounds with her on to the divan, for the maddest, fiercest activity of love. Nijinsky was inexpressibly wild, a cat caressing, a tiger devouring, now at her feet, now at her breasts and mouth, stroking and exciting her. Like a monkey, he would sometimes swing himself, hesitating, from side to side, as a feverish animal might do, staring at this pale, marvellous woman whom he so desired. Every nerve and muscle in his body quivered separately. His lightness and swiftness were unbelievable, but it was sensuality all the way.

“Fokine’s choreography was extremely complicated, increasing around taut and through the basic centres of the body, in his superimposed riots of the dancers the essence of a sexual sympathy with his audience was evoked. It was such a wild riot of continuous flaring violence that there seemed no beginning or end, and it increased, swelling, so that when the harem is reeling in a rout of frenzied joy and satisfaction, they want more and more and more, and in the centre, whenever, for a second, the different dancers sink in a triumphant crash, the gold slave like a drawn scimitar, and Vaslav, a self-hypnotized dervish, spurs the others by his amazing *tour en l’air* on and on, with his own incredible virtuosity, full of consciousness and nerves, dominating the orgy.

“When the Shah returns, he is the first to see him. One moment of petrifying fear, like a tiger standing in a single second’s stare at his enemy, then with a leap he is gone. But he is chased back, flashed through the stage, clad in gold tissue, his jewels sparkling. With the slightest part of his head he touches the floor, after he has been struck by the soldier’s sword, falls down with his whole body, legs shot into the air, silvery, glittering like a fish towed on the sand, one vibrant quiver, the nerves and muscles shudder all through his frame, and golden slave is dead on his face.”

Schéhérazade, more than any one other ballet, has stood in memory as the symbol of the first shock of the Russian ballet, the shock of the colour, the then unfamiliar music, the incredible dances. It was the symbol set into motion by Fokine on the unrepeatable frame of Bakst’s decor. Of Bakst, it was said after his death by Paul Morand, summing

up this period in the history of the world's art, that, "It is true that his art is too often vulgar, barbaric, effective only as a blow between the eyes; but such as it is, it has now become an historical phenomenon with its fifteen years of influence upon manners, the theatre, the city, books, and music It has been said that it was a Jewish art, with its emphasis upon raw tones, its passion for gold and precious metals, its dearth of line, its nomadic origins, its Oriental sensuality, its contempt for architectural construction. Bakst was, in fact, a Jew; and it was the great Israelite audiences that established the success of the Russian Ballet, that first great international success, marked by the boldness of the audience's dress, its immodesties, extravagant coiffures, depilated bodies, cosmetics; by that mixture of all modes to the point where one could not always distinguish between the house and the stage."

The first and second season of the Russian Ballet had such an unqualified and monumental success that a return engagement was quickly demanded, and for twenty years the high point of Europe's successive seasons were the visits of the Russian dancers. For the third year Fokine designed the undersea ballet of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Sadko*, Tcherepnin's *Narcisse*, *Petrouchka* and *Spectre de la Rose*. The dances from *Sadko* were interesting in their pictorialization of the flowing rivers finding their source in the springs under the sea. In it, Nijinsky was memorable in a costume of hooded black sequins, and Bakst's technical assistant, the painter Anisfeld, made his debut as an able stage-designer, with pale nacreous drops, an indistinct background for various groups, at first motionless, then troubling their arms

with a liquid restlessness, then flowing into an unending dance at the command of Sadko's voice. The naiads, the streams and rivers, the gold and silver fish, the twelve princesses, the conch-shell heralds of the king of the sea, all the monsters of the deep came to motion in a translucent dream. 1911 was also the year of *Narcisse*, a curious ballet with grotesque interludes and some moments of magnificent dancing.

In it, Nijinsky appeared "like a figure realized from Phidias, in an ash-blond wig, secured by an apple-green band in a slight white chiton. His sister Bronia, as the chief Bacchante was an epitome of inebriate wildness; with a superb daring, she was allowed the ugliness of abandon. The whole ballet was white and green, except for the costumes of the shepherds and the bacchantes. Karsavina, as Echo, had a delicious piece of choreography, repeating, in the third plane of the stage, Narcisse's gestures on the first. Diaghilev advised her not to trip lightly like a graceful nymph. 'I see, rather, a monumental figure; a tragic mask: Niobe.'"

"There was throughout the music of M. Tcherepnin,* as elsewhere, the spirit of the good-looking Narcisse coquetting with his reflected image, and the unsuccessful efforts of Echo to capture his infatuation. This indecision was caught up and expressed in the long trailing foliage of a grove of the Gods, slowly stirring in a dark-green sea of heavy peacefulness, and silently torn to threads by uncertainty instead of forming big masses and rhythmical shapes expressive of the

* Huntley Carter: *The New Spirit in Drama and Art*: N.Y. and London, 1913.

ordered mind. The earliest arrivals in the music and the scene were the wild decorative Bœotians disporting with rather heavy heart and tread in the strange green twilight. Then succeeded the love motives, and the woodland scene marked the rhythm vividly of the whirling lines and the maze of colour of the Bacchantes. These seemed now to flutter like brilliant butterflies upon the soft flight of foliage, now to touch the stooping trees with drifting fire as they passed swiftly beneath them. Then Narcisse was changed into a flower—a really dreadful property flower that disgraced the production; Echo became a rock. Once more the Bœotian motive, and the wild creatures patterned the amber sunset with fantastical shapes, and in the green gloom of that grove of the Gods one felt Vanity kissing a shadow.”

During the season of 1910, in Paris, the French poet, Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, a young man around the Diaghilev entourage, had suggested that a charming ballet might be made from Thèophile Gautier’s *Loin du Bal* :

“ Je suis le spèctre d’une rose,
Que tu portais hier au bal ”

While Fokine was rehearsing *Sadko* and *Narcisse* in the Ekaterinsky Theatre, toward the late winter of 1911, he composed the exquisite choreography of *Spèctre de la Rose*, for the express use of Nijinsky and Karsavina.

Bakst set it in a girl’s enchanting room, lofty, pure white and blue. In an alcove curtained in muslin is her bed, with an embroidery frame next to it. On one side a couch of pink cretonne, and a table, white, with a white bowl of roses on it. Two great windows at right and left framed the

night's scented garden. The music was a Berlioz transcription for orchestra of Carl Maria von Weber's *Invitation à la Valse*.

Spèctre, as simple, as obvious, as perennial as the flower which it essentializes, is too familiar to describe. A beautiful description of it is to be found in the life of Nijinsky, by his wife. The famous leap, which was almost to become a trade-mark, was an unconscious invention of Bakst, Fokine and Vaslav. Bakst wanted to hang a cage with two canaries in it, by a ribbon from the centre of one window. But Nijinsky asked, "How do I get in?" Every time the cage was taken down, and hung somewhere else, Bakst would replace it, almost in tears, until Vaslav finally had the idea of not entering the room, but merely appearing as if a rose petal had been blown through the window, and as a rose petal he was blown out.

At the première, in Paris, Vaudoyer the poet, congratulated Fokine with the most heartfelt homage for his magnificent realization of his libretto. Fokine had created a perfect thing. It was more the soul of Gauthier than Gauthier himself. Fokine was a genius. Fokine tried to stop him, depreciated his own part, reminded him that after all, he had himself, a hand in it. "Nothing" cried Vaudoyer, "all I did was to introduce Theophile Gauthier to Michel Fokine."

Fokine, in all of his work up to this time, had been progressing, or developing towards a single objective in the dance. The French had given to theatrical dancing grace, line and suavity. The Italians had enriched it with acrobatics and technical splendour. The Russians made it

express an idea. Fokine was the most Russian of Russians. In him were compounded the heritage of France and Italy, but with a definite purpose for the given medium's employment. He was working, not towards farce, nor technique. He presupposed these. He was working towards dance drama, the complete form of gesture, without any pretext but the emotive subject-matter of his choice.

In *Petrouchka*, a past is evoked as in *Cléopâtre*, *Narcisse* and *Schéhérazade*. But it is not the distant past. It needs no archæological or synthetic study to make its setting convincing. It is a past which was very present in the Petersburg of its creation—a street fair in the Admiralty Square in the Moscow of 1830. It was to feast richly on the folk sources of Russia, and its grotesque denouement, comic and extravagant, with Nijinsky in his role of the immortal puppet, the Russian Ballet presented a major tragedy.

Even in their own early youths Fokine and the painter Benois had seen similar popular spectacles with show-booths holding the familiar Punch and Judy figures of *Petrouchka*, the Ballerina and the wicked Moor. *Petrouchka* is Russia's Punch, her Pierrot, her Puck, her Tyl Eulenspiegel—the ridiculously unfortunate butt of the nation's typical bullies, the unfortunate child of laughable disaster. It is a national Russian legend and international myth. Benois momentarily deserted Versailles, to create a wholly Russian world of trained bears, Caucasian gypsies, coachmen of the Muscovite-bourgeoisie, organ grinders and fur-capped moujiks. It was almost a Slavic challenge to Bakst's Hellenism and Orientalism. And Stravinsky's music

was Russian, among the most perfect dancing music of any time, written to be listened to, while watching action.

Edwin Evans, in his excellent musical analysis of *Petrouchka*, says that after *L'Oiseau de Feu*, the young composer was interested in several technical problems of "unexplored possibilities in its characteristic interval of the augmented fourth . . .

"This new device he proceeded to exploit in a concert-piece for piano and orchestra, which was composed at Lausanne in August and September, 1910. When it was completed he was much exercised in his mind what to call it. He was not satisfied with such generic descriptions as *Burlesque*, or *Scherzo*, or still less *Concertstück*. He wanted something more specific, something that would aid the listener to grasp the intention of the music. It was then, when the piece lay complete before him, that there flashed into his mind the affinity it had with a concept common to all countries, that of the 'poor, funny, ugly, sentimental and misguided character, constantly shaken with rebellious rage, whether justified or not, that is known in France as *Pierrot*, in Germany as *Kasperle*, and in Russia as *Petrouchka*.' There on the spur of the moment, the title was found. The concert-piece for piano and orchestra was christened *Petrouchka*. Once the title was settled it was natural that Stravinsky should pursue the same train of thought. First he wrote a companion-piece for piano and orchestra, a *Danse Russe*. Before he had time to add the inevitable third piece, and make the work a suite, he found himself meditating an entire poem upon the mysterious life of *Petrouchka*. Those two superimposed chords may, perhaps, have been the starting-

point which led the composer's meditation to Petrouchka's two conflicting entities, human and puppet, which are the key to the enigma—'a key which is not known even to him who believes himself to have brought Petrouchka to life: the Magician.' Very soon the projected poem took a choreographic shape, in which the plastic of the dancers' gesture was to correspond to that of the music."

The bustle in the beginning of the music is merely the reflection of a shifting crowd. When the curtain rises, we do not see dancers, but merely folk at a fair. But it's not long before one realizes that those folk could only be dancers. Fokine created an orderly hurly-burly, a pattern of pushing and shoving broken by sudden entrances of nursemaids and coachmen. The old Charlatan in his booth points to the pendent dolls and with his wand taps them to life. The virtuosity of dancing such complicated steps while supported in air is a feat which few can accomplish. Fokine made wooden puppets kick with an awkward brilliance which was only an incident in this monument of dancing. The roles of the handsome Moor, symbol of luck and the South, who prays to his orange-god in a toy-obedience of rich humour, that cruel trumpeter, the ballerina flirt, and above all, ugly Petrouchka, misformed, straw-fleshed, changeling of the North, the fool of the Charlatan, of more handsome men and lovely ladies, like all great roles, reward a thousand times the great dancers who interpret them. Fokine was fortunate in having Bolm, Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina.

That splendid critic of dancing, the late André Levinson has

written* the most accurate paragraphs on the style of Fokine.

“The first, the grand manner of Fokine has been the *parody* in and of choreography. Those dances which we were shown in the rustic dances of the first scene, and then of the puppet-ballerina, are an ironic deformation of ballet steps—while nurses, postillions or masquers gain by grotesque exaggeration, imposed by the master, the movements of folk dances.

For the dolls, in the interior scenes, the method is different. Petrouchka is a puppet constrained by a mechanical, limited, angular movement. But Petrouchka loves. This makes him almost human; he tries to express himself. This determines his sorry sport on the stage. In vain the soul flutters against an armature which imprisons it, unable to free itself; the fervent gestures come to naught, and fades again into the automatism of a doll. And this *dualism* in the movement, poignant and abrupt, controls the breath of a whole audience. Finally there's the crowd of Fair folk which revivify the old Saint Petersburg. This crowd, wanders *freely*, grouping itself according to the accident of the action without occupying itself too much with the musical rhythm: the sonorous fresco of Stravinsky serves it simply as a background. But suddenly the danced episodes break in, designing themselves and then losing themselves in the gay bustle.”

Petrouchka was composed in pieces, both in the music and in the dances. The piano score was more or less ready for rehearsals in St. Petersburg, the orchestral score was written at Charens, in Switzerland, and not finished until May, in Rome. Fokine rehearsed the dancers also in Rome, in a big

* Proper: The Russian Ballet in Western Europe. London, 1931.

hall under the Teatro Costanza, which Diaghilev had taken for his first Italian season. Even on the train, from Rome to Berlin, Fokine demonstrated his dances. The doll was one of the few parts which Nijinsky did not immediately learn, so before the premiere in Paris at the Chaletel on the evening of June 13th, 1911, he begged Fokine not to sit in the orchestra, as was his wont on first nights, but to remain on the stage and prompt him.

Contemporary Soviet critics see in *Petrouchka* the eternal, immortal soul of the Russian proletariat, invincibly clapping its hands above the booth of that old Charlatan Bureaucratic Tyranny. Others can see in it whatever great truth about life they choose and see accurately in this mortal minor. In the perfect blending of folk dances, of dramatic episodes, of classical dancing, of technical virtuosity, and of human meaning, *Petrouchka* is Fokine's masterpiece, and has never been surpassed as the flower of dance drama.

In the next season, 1912, Fokine created for the great dancer Tamara Karsavina, the choreographic melodrama of *Tamar*. The music is by Ivan Balakirev, after a poem of the Caucasian Lermontov. It was more than an intensified *Clèopatre* put into a Russian decor. It was the definition of the curious semi-oriental, tigerish, mountaineer ennui, the isolation of cliffs and plains, an introspective sadism which is undiluted by the boredom. In Bakst's high-founded brick red tower, the Queen Tamar, tossing on her couch, fails to be amused by the gyrations of her fantastic court. She waves a scarf out of the window, to snare a young traveller wandering below on the banks of Terek River, in whose angry waters so many of her lovers have been thrown. "The sheer

height of the walls echoed the relentless cruelty of the crowd that filled the room, and the great black cloaks of the stranger, and of the Queen's servants, among the reds and blues of the women, startled one to a sense of impending tragedy.* Her heavy nerved eyes rove through the big window on to the wild Dariol mountains. When the scarves are swept away from the stranger's face, Tamar takes him for another hour's hostage to a pastime that is no release, and the curtain falls, with him tossed to the Terek, and she half-eagerly, half-listlessly signalling to another traveller."

Tamar was more drama than dance. It was a superb piece of composition for a particular dancer. Lacking Karsavina, it is unthinkable. It was the third of Fokine's erotic ballets and the most ferocious. Now critics were convinced the art of the Russians was, at this violence, degenerate, decadent, and generally too exciting to watch. It was Bakst's libretto, his dresses and decor, but Fokine, freed of any slight pretext of Persian divertissement or Egyptian interlude forced the dancers into a sullen activity of baleful, restless hate.

He also designed the East Indian pastiche of *Le Dieu Bleu*, which contained some amazing virtuoso passages for Nijinsky, as a living blue god from Ajanta, his fingers sprouting into the gilt-barbed hieratic precision of a mobile Shiva. Bakst's designs were brilliant with vivid memories of Muhgal miniatures and the brass and plaited shawls of the bazaars. Diaghilev made a weak choice in the first musician commissioned for a ballet outside Russia, in Reynaldo Hahn, and it was not a great success.

* M. D. Calvocoressi.

Daphnis et Chloe, with Maurice Ravel's interesting music and Bakst's finest decorations in his Grecian style, really marked the end of the great work which Fokine composed expressly for Diaghilev. Without that generosity, which might indeed have impaired his devouring enthusiasm, Diaghilev allowed little time for rehearsals to Fokine, and plainly showed he was entirely interested with a new revolutionist, Vaslav Nijinsky, who was now preparing his *Afternoon of a Faun*.

As early as 1904 or 1905, Fokine had thought of the romance of Longus for the possible subject for a ballet. The musician, Kardletz, wanted a libretto and Fokine drew up a book, plans for a whole ballet, the introduction of which served to embody an important manifesto on policy and direction to the directors of the Imperial School. Teliakovsky said it would do, but never had the energy to mount it, and it was forgotten until Diaghilev commissioned Ravel to compose music for it.

"Ravel* never thought of dealing with this particular subject in any form until 1909, when it was offered to him by Diaghilev, who, with the help of his advisers, had been eagerly casting round for subjects as well as for composers. Various libretti, all of them very conventional, had been outlined, and were submitted to Ravel to choose from. I well remember him, Diaghilev, Fokine, Bakst, Benois, and myself in Diaghilev's little sitting-room (red plush and mahogany, alas!) at the Hotel de Hollande as it then was, finally deciding for *Daphnis*, and offering suggestions as to

* D'Andre: Anna Pavlova: London, 1933.



IN DAPHNIS AND CHLOE.

particulars of plot and incidents, Fokine eventually casting the libretto into shape to Ravel's satisfaction.

"I also remember that the very first bars of music which Ravel wrote were inspired by the memory of a wonderful leap sideways which Nijinsky (who was to be Daphnis) used to perform in a *pas seul* in *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, a ballet produced by Diaghilev that very season; and that they were intended to provide the opportunity for similar leaps—the pattern characterized by a run and a long pause, which runs through Daphnis's dance, pages 26 and after, of the piano score."

Daphnis had many splendid groups and much fine action. It is regretted that, due to personal reasons, it was withdrawn so quickly from their repertory. Diaghilev must have felt some slight guilt about it, for he often promised a revival, a promise, however, which he never had time to fulfil. This ballet was the other side to Fokine's medal: tender, firmly bucolic, the final inscription of homage to Hellas which had proceeded from *Acis and Galatea*, through *Eunice*, the Greek dances in *Clèopatre*, *Narcisse*, to the refined statement of *Daphnis*.

"In front of the altar* of the nymphs a crowd of young girls bearing garlands prostrate themselves. Daphnis and Chloe are among these devotees. The ceremony resolves itself into a religious dance. Daphnis has not awakened to the fact that he loves Chloë, and she in turn fears that he is not master of his own heart, but jealousy lays bare their mutual regard. Chloe suffers at seeing the maidens embrace

*D'Andre: Anna Pavlova: London, 1933.

Daphnis in their dances and Daphnis resents the presence of the young men about Chloe.

“In innocence Chloe draws into the dance the clownish herdsman, Dorco. Whereupon the company propose a contest between the herdsman and Daphnis, and a kiss from Chloe shall reward the victor.

“Dorco dances a grotesque figure; Daphnis follows with steps light and gracious. Daphnis and Chloe fall into mutual embrace, while the crowd admire their beauty. Chloe runs away while Daphnis lapses into dreaming languor, not responding to the wiles of Lycenion.

“Presently is heard the shout of voices in alarm, and a group of women pursued by brigands cross the scene. Daphnis flies to the aid of Chloe, whose life is perhaps in danger. An instant later Chloe reappears, distracted, and throws herself before the altar of the nymphs, but a group of brigands seize her and carry her off. Daphnis, returning, finds a sandal lost by a young girl in the mêlée. He curses the gods and falls inanimate. Lights grow dim and the statues of the nymphs one by one become endowed with life, and, leaving their pedestals, descend to console Daphnis. They invoke the god Pan, who emerges from a rock.

“The scene changes to the camp of the brigands where Chloe is a prisoner. She performs a dance of supplication. Briaxis, the pirate chief, woos her, when suddenly the atmosphere changes, strange gleams light up the night, Pan appears in a cloud and enfolds Chloe.

“The limpid serenity of the first scene is again resumed. Search is made for Daphnis and Chloe, and when their companions bring them back and Daphnis beholds his beloved,

he knows that his dream was prophetic and that Pan has really intervened on his behalf.

“Then Lammon, the old countryman, tells to all that Pan has graciously acted in memory of his ancient love for the nymph Syrinx. Whereupon the assembled company join in a dance to the celebration of this old love-tale and end in joyous applause to the betrothal of Daphnis and Chloe.”

Now, Fokine left Diaghilev for nearly two years. He returned to the Marinsky Theatre. After his leaves of absence, finally as Maître de Ballet. After the retirement of Petipa, there was a tentative interregnum of ballets by Legat, Skiraev and Ivanov, but however fine teachers or dancers their men may have been, they were poor designers of dances. Now Fokine was elevated to the official position that he so long had deserved; he also danced and taught as before, but now he created his own ballets for the regular Marinsky company.

Les Preludes, music by Liszt, after a poem of Lamartine, was an abstract ballet, without any subject-matter except fine choreography, danced not on points, but freely in the liberated classic style of Fokine's traditional renaissance, in costumes of loose elegance inspired by Botticelli's Primavera. It interpreted the music by its visual reflection of the music and it might be labelled legibly, if not accurately, as perhaps the first of the “Modern Ballets,” that is occupied in a specific manner with pure dancing, with no association or overtone induced by the past in overtones of either music or the spirit of the dances. The costumes were universalized.

Pierre Vladimirov, after Nijinsky the first dancer of the Marinsky Theatre, and Tamara Karsavina created in 1913,

the chief roles in *Les Preludes*, which five years later, in New York, Laurent Novikov and Pavlova were to dance.

“To revert to the question of how Petipa and Fokine composed their ballets, it is necessary to state that I was personally present during Fokine’s composition of two of his ballets for Pavlova in Berlin. *The Seven Daughters* to the music of Spendiarov and Liszt’s *Preludes*. Speaking of this, I cannot help recalling how, after the first performance of Liszt’s *Preludes*, both Richard Strauss and Nikisch came behind the scenes to give Pavlova and Fokine their opinions. Here the difference in the temperaments of these two great musicians showed itself in a remarkable manner. Strauss expressed his great pleasure to Pavlova and paid a few compliments to Fokine, whereas Nikisch was genuinely enthusiastic, declaring that he could not imagine a better interpretation of Liszt’s music and Lamartine’s poem.”

Les Preludes, with fine decor by Anisfeld, had a fascinating contrapuntal choreography of the masculine evil and the feminine good natures in a being. When Amor entered in a magnificent sustained leap, the demons were felled as by the impact of his landing and the dances showed all of Fokine’s grave knowledge of the rhythmic and dramatic contrast between the activity of the male and female bodies.

For a single season, Fokine returned to Diaghilev. Old differences were forgotten. Nijinsky, married, had been disinherited. 1914 marks the last year of many institutions. It stands also as the last chapter-heading in the first volume of the history of the Russian Ballet in the twentieth century, in which volume the name of Fokine must most often appear.

The ballets were *The Legend of Joseph*, *Midas*, *Papillions*, and the entire *mise en scène* for both opera and ballet in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Coq d'Or*. *Joseph*, with uninspired music by Richard Strauss, had a book by Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, the great Viennese poet. It was the bible-story of Joseph and Potiphar, but set in Bakst's costumes in the epoch of the greatest Venetian glory, of Paulo Veronese. The scenery was invented by the mural painter, José Maria Sert, but the whole production seemed top-heavy, too decorative. The chief role was constructed around a young boy called Leonide Massine, a private dancing-school pupil Diaghilev had discovered in Moscow.

Papillions was a continuation of *Carnival*. It had the former's lightness, but it was on a far larger scale. *Coq d'Or*, however, was an unqualified success. Here for the first time the lively talent of Natalia Gontcharova was used to construct a setting which was a Russian folk-story realized in life. Fokine had the brilliant idea of banking the singers in boxes on either side of the stage, and having dancers mime the action, unrestricted by voices in the centre.

Diaghilev hardly ever made any suggestions to Fokine, never asked him to change pieces of action here or there. There was an exception, however, in the rehearsals of *Coq d'Oor*. Fokine, designing the mimicry, was instructing a dancer to clasp his hand to his heart in anguish.

"His heart, Michel; not his liver," called Diaghilev. "His heart's on the other side."

Fokine had worked not only for Diaghilev and for the Czar, but he had been active all over Europe. In 1908 he had produced *Evinka* and *Chopiniana* in Warsaw, at the

State Theatre; in 1910 he gave Stockholm *Cleopatra* and *Sylphides*; in 1911 he was at Milan, and back in Scandinavia again. The war broke up any consecutive creation for the Marinsky Theatre. He did, however, produce *Eros* for the first dancer, Pierre Vladimirov, who, after Nijinsky, was the greatest of the male Russians, and later Pavlova's international partner.

In *Eros*, a young girl (later to be the fine dancer, Felia Doubrovskaya), goes into an Italian church and takes away with her the memory of an angel, who later becomes in a dream the God of Love. The music was Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Orchestra.

Fokine's reputation was universal, but in Russia, both by circumstance and accident, his full talents were never given the unrestricted leeway that they deserved. And there were his adverse critics, such as the official Volinsky who swore that Fokine destroyed the male tradition in dancing, that he was an erotomaniac and all the chief roles were hermaphroditic. How patently false this is can be simply realized by remembering *Igor*, *Schéhérazade*, *Tamar* or *Petrouchka*.

For Tchaikovsky's symphonic poem, Fokine composed in 1915 *Francesca da Rimini*. As *mise en scène* it was one of the most striking pieces of stage-craft he had even realized. Dante, led by Virgil, just as in the Inferno, encounters Francesca in the whirlwind of lovers, foaming in their doomed monotony, around the great circle of the stages and on different levels, in successively illuminated scenes, all the past history of her lover and her murderer are displayed in terrible action. And at the end, Dante, "through

compassion fainting, seem'd not far from death, and like a corpse, fell to the ground."

During the war there were many charity performances of ballet at the Imperial Theatres, for refugees and homeless children. A woman suddenly introduced herself to Fokine at the Nicoleavsky Railway Station. She pointed out the hundreds of hopeless, despaired people, and Fokine gave a special gala for houses of refuge. In 1916 he composed *Jota Aragonesa*, on the music of Glazounov, with wonderful Spanish decor by Golovin, and one of the boys in a charming *pas de caractère* was the Georgian, Balanchavidze, who as Georges Balanchine, became Diaghilev's last choreographer, from 1924 to 1929. Thus the tradition of the *maître de ballet* is handed down in a direct line, like a dynastic descent.

It was nearly impossible to produce new ballets during the war, although the old repertory was more or less maintained. But Fokine was invited to the city of Riga to dance with his wife. At first this seemed very curious to a man who was accustomed to an ensemble of two hundred performers. But times were different now. Fokine and Fokina appeared with great success, and then went on a tour of concert dances all over Russia in 1915-16.

When the revolution of 1917 broke, Fokine was on his way to fulfil an engagement in Stockholm. But there was revolt in Finland, too, and it was necessary to wait for a month in the town of Abö. He had intended to return to Russia, but they would take any boat outgoing to Sweden. There were no boats and their cash was gone. Madame Fokina proposed to sell what jewels and furs she had with

her. They sat down at a restaurant with their last coins, to order a drink and talk over their dreary situation.

Near by some Russian officers were sitting. Fokine asked one of them if he knew anything about a Stockholm boat. The officer at once recognised the dancer, introduced him to his friends and arranged a performance at once, which was easy for them, as these soldiers were in the habit of giving more or less amateur artistic evenings. There were two packed houses on two successive nights, and the Fokines earned enough to leave in sleighs across the frozen waters to Ekazy, three days and three nights with a convoy of German prisoners. There they were stopped and refused permission to travel further with the military escort, and after a few days on this desolate Finnish Island, a telegram from Stockholm allowed them to reach their destination.

When they arrived in the capital they found it was too late to do *Petrouchka*, as they had intended. Besides it was too Russian and politically tactless for the moment. Luckily, however, they had their costumes with them and made a concert tour, throughout Sweden. In Copenhagen they gave seven concerts in two weeks. Fokine was able to buy a house there and lived in Denmark for a year. The Ballet Mistress of the Royal Opera House, Madame Walbaum, arranged for a production of *Une Nuit d'Egypte*, which came at a very opportune moment. In spite of a nationalistic newspaper campaign against Walbaum, Fokine's incumbency was a triumph, and the time he was not occupied with the ballet he gave lessons, from early morning to late night—to pupils who came from Norway, Sweden, Russia, Germany, and, of course, Denmark.

In 1919, the American Impresario, Morris Gest, made Fokine an offer to come to America to stage *Aphrodite*, a huge extravaganza after the novel of Pierre Louys. And there was an unforgettable concert performance with Fokine at the New York Hippodrome, with all 7,000 seats sold out two weeks before. In 1920 came *Mecca*, another spectacle, and Fokine established himself as a force in the American Theatre. For Florenz Ziegfeld he staged a ballet in his *Follies*, for which Joseph Urban created a gallery in a museum of the 1850's, where, after dark, the Greek marbles and Egyptian granites came to life, to play for a night with the sleepy tourists, locked in by mistake.

Though the disgraceful policy of the Metropolitan Opera Company, which produced *Petrouchka* and *Coq d'Or*, without Fokine's direction, he has never been in a position in America to fulfil his greatest capability. The Italian bureaucracy in that moribund house has seen to it no Russian fire may ever illuminate the dusty officialdom of its preposterous programs. Up to the present, ballet companies are only connected with the opera in the United States, and the name of Fokine has been too much dynamite for them to stomach.

In spite of this he has done much teaching, continuing the great tradition of classical dancing which he enriched, and the best dancers in America have benefited from his training. He has danced with his wife extensively in concert and staged his own *Medusa* in 1925. In New York he had as many as five productions under his eye at once. He has been *maître de ballet* at Milan, Warsaw, Copenhagen (again in 1925), Riga (in 1929), and at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires in 1931, where, besides producing his earlier works, he created

Paul Dukas's *Sorcier's Apprentice* and *The Adventures of Harlequin* to music by Beethoven. Now he is in Paris creating for Ida Rubinstein a new series of ballets.

To have studied under Fokine is to have experienced an unforgettable illumination into the sources of gesture, the definition of style, the creation of theatrical effect. His exercises are not dry, back-breaking labour. When he indicates a reaching motion of the arms, he says: "Reach as if you are touching." When he imitates the walk of a marquis, he breaks up the mincing, pointed feet, into the components of etiquette. He discovers for his pupils the basic idea behind motion.

Toward the modern dance he is always open-minded. He admires in Escudero, Shan-Kar and Argentina the contemporary perfection of dances springing from the cultures of folk expression and folk worship. Toward independent expression, whether it is Duncan, Dalcroze, Wigman or Graham, he maintains a respectful animosity.

Already in 1911, Prince Wolkonsky, a passionate amateur of dancing, had imported young Paul Thévanaz, the painter, to demonstrate the new gospel of Dalcroze Eurythmics. Thévanaz galloped about the practice room, imitating a charioteer, moving his body with all the contrapuntal calisthenics of the master of Hellerau. Fokine was silent, but after it was over, he turned to two of his students at the Imperial School, Rosai and Vladimirov. With a nod from the master, they imitated Thévanaz perfectly—except they did him one better. Rosai was jockey and Vladimirov a racehorse, and in a witty parody of the Dalcroze gestures

they improvised a brilliant dance in the classical idiom, interpolating pirouettes and leaps which an untrained dancer could no more accomplish than fly.

He has said: "The ballet is a form of art. Modernism is a temporary condition, a period in the evolution of an art. The ballet has lived through classicism and romanticism as well as modernism . . . Ignorance and dilettantism are not new. They have always existed, only in our time they have flourished more profusely."

There is nothing quite so transitory as the fame and recognition of a choreographer unless it be the memory of a dance. Ballets have a sad way of becoming connected with the reputation of an outstanding performer, or else as illustrative of a certain quaint period in the development of dancing. Fokine's Greek ballets are no longer given, since, through him, Greece was revived until, in combination with Duncan's gospel, it no longer seemed the unfamiliar lively Greece which first amazed us. The Oriental ballets are undanceable, since they apply mainly to the first shock of the organization of the Ballets Russe in Western Europe. The Harlequin series have had their edges dimmed by music-hall imitation. *Sylphides*, *Igor*, *Petroushka* remain, and soon *Sylphides* will be discovered to be no grand essence of the classic, that is of the real classic, which we may draw out of an earlier epoch, from Vestris perhaps—and *Petroushka*, like many plays of Shakespeare, if frankly examined, will be retired on an honourable discharge. Perhaps *Igor* will, because of its plasticity, survive longer.

This is naturally the price any popularity exacts. Who now remembers Noverre's *Medea*, or his *Ballet Chinois*?

The quickeners, intensifiers, revivifiers, reactors of an art, particularly in such a specialized medium as theatrical dancing, have in common a rapid, intense, renascent, creative influence. Such an expenditure of energy is not given to them for long. Jealous nature demands a crippling fee of forgetfulness, to permit other talents to arise, doomed in their time to an unearned oblivion. It is novelty, the quality of strumpets which is the first seduction of ballet. Yet principles of ballet, the substructure of surprise is a constant gospel revealed to all great masters of ballet. It was not Michel Fokine, but Jean Georges Noverre, who said: "It may be objected that dancing is now in so improved a state that it may please, nay, enchant without the accessory ornaments of expression and sentiment . . . I readily acknowledge that, as to mechanical execution, the art has attained the highest degree of perfection: I shall even confess that it sometimes is graceful: but gracefulness is but a small portion of the qualities it requires."

"What I call the mechanical parts of dancing are the steps linked to each other with ease and brilliancy, the aplomb, steadiness, activity, liveliness, and a well-directed opposition between the arms and legs. When all these parts are managed without genius, when the latter does not direct these different motions, and animate them by the fire of sentiment and expression, I feel neither emotion nor concern. The dexterity of the dancer obtains my applause; I admire the automaton, but I experience no further sensation. It has upon me the same effect as the most beautiful line, whose words are uncouthly set asunder, producing sound, not sense. As for instance, what would a reader feel

at hearing the following detached words : *Fame-lives-in-dies-he-cause-who-in-virtue's*? Yet these very words aptly joined by the man of genius, by Shakespeare, express the noblest sentiment :

' He lives in Fame who dies in Virtue's cause.'

“ From the above comparison we may fairly conclude that the art of Dancing has in itself all that is necessary to speak the best language, but that it is not enough to be acquainted only with its alphabet. Let the man of genius put the letters together, form the words, and from these produce regular sentences; the art shall no longer be mute, but speak with true energy, and the ballets will share with the best dramatic pieces the peculiar advantage of exciting the tenderest feelings; nay, of receiving the tribute of a tear; while, in a less serious style, this art will please, entertain and charm the spectators. Dancing, thus ennobled by the expression of sentiment, and under the direction of a man of true genius, will, in time, obtain the praises which the enlightened world bestows on poetry and painting, and become entitled to the rewards with which the latter are daily honoured.”

